Welcome to 'Prep Talk,' the emergency management podcast. Find out what you need to know about preparedness. Get all the latest tips from experts in the field, and learn what to do before the next disaster strikes. From the Emergency Management Department in the city that never sleeps, here are your hosts, Omar Bourne and Allison Pennisi.

Hello, everyone. Thank you for listening. I'm Omar Bourne.

And I'm Christina Farrell.

And you are our listeners, and we thank you for joining us.

We want you to come back as often as you can, and feel free to add Prep Talk to your favorite RSS feed. You can also follow us on social media at our Twitter, Facebook and Instagram sites.

We have an exciting episode in store for you today that salutes women in emergency management. And Christina, who is our guest co-host because Allison is out on maternity leave, she was actually a special guest last year for our 'Women in Emergency Management' podcast. So thank you for being here this time as a co-host.

Big shoes to fill, but I'll do my best.

You'll do great.

To mark Women's History Month, Prep Talk has invited two guests to share their experiences working in emergency management and how the field has evolved.

That's right, Christina. We're going to be talking to Linda Reissman, who serves as a director of emergency management at Memorial Sloan Kettering, and Penny Neferis, the director of business continuity, disaster recovery, and emergency response at JetBlue.

Before we dive in, it is time to give our listeners the latest hot topics in the emergency management field.

Here's your 'Prep Talk' situation report.

Our first story comes from Homeland Security. The Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA, is helping Puerto Rico prepare for emergencies. That's right, FEMA has created a pilot program that provides free trainings to local emergency
managers in Puerto Rico. Some of the trainings include emergency operations planning, debris management planning and threat identification and risk assessment.

Omar Bourne: 02:11 The pilot program, which started April, 2018, aims to help Puerto Rico better prepare for and respond to emergencies ranging from hurricanes, earthquakes and floods. To date, FEMA instructors have offered 87 trainings to over 2,000 participants.

Christina F: 02:29 And now a note about one of our former guests. Samantha Phillips is the new director of the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency. As our regular listeners will recall, Sam was a special guest on the podcast last year for Women's History Month. She also served as the director of the National Center for Security and Preparedness at SUNY-Albany, as well as the director of emergency management for the city of Philadelphia, where she managed several emergencies including Hurricane Irene in 2011, Hurricane Sandy in 2012, and the fatal 2015 Amtrak derailment.

Christina F: 03:05 Sam has also been responsible for public safety coordination for major special events, and served in a leadership capacity for the visit of Pope Francis I in September, 2015, and the Democratic National Convention in 2016. Phillips will succeed outgoing director Kurt Schwartz, who has spent 30 years in public service to the people of Massachusetts. We wish our friend Sam best wishes as she begins her new role.

Omar Bourne: 03:31 Our next story comes from Politico. Environmental advocates are concerned with the US Army Corps of Engineers storm surge plan. They say the proposal does not sufficiently account for flooding caused by sea level rise, and are asking for more time to assess the options.

Omar Bourne: 03:50 The Army Corps announced in July that it was considering six proposals to combat storm surge caused by major weather events like Superstorm Sandy, which included a five-mile barrier that would stretch from Breezy Point in New York to Sandy Hook in New Jersey. The Army Corps also recently released its interim report providing new financial estimates for all of the proposals and more details as to what the construction would entail, but advocates say they are disappointed the latest update also does not fully address the risk posed by sea level rise.
The Army Corps will hold eight public hearings to gather input on the latest report. The first is scheduled for March 12th at the Westchester County Center in White Plains, New York.

One more item for our Sit Rep. As people have probably heard, FEMA Administrator Brock Long resigned in February. Long, who had been the head of the nation’s Emergency Management Agency for the past two years, was highly praised for his response to Hurricane Harvey, but sharply criticized for FEMA’s handling of Hurricane Maria’s devastation of Puerto Rico.

In a statement announcing his departure, Brock noted that in his two years leading the agency, FEMA had handled more than 220 declared disasters, including several hurricanes that caused profound damage in Texas, Puerto Rico and along the East Coast.

Said Long, "As a career emergency management professional, I could not be prouder to have worked alongside the devoted hardworking men and women of FEMA for these past two years."

The president has nominated Jeffrey Byard, FEMA’s associate administrator for the Office of Response and Recovery, to replace Long.

And that's this episode's situation report.

Thank you very much, Christina.

Up next, Linda Reissman and Penny Neferis join the show. First, here is a public service announcement from the New York City Share Your Space Survey.

New York City needs your help to make our community safer, stronger, and better prepared. Support your community by getting involved in the NYC Emergency Management Share Your Space Survey.

Do you manage or own a facility in NYC with a large interior room like a community center, a place of worship or a campus facility? These can be used for outreach, for training, as a gathering space in an emergency, or as a disaster recovery center for your community. Community spaces can be used as a resource before, during and after an emergency. Organizations citywide are encouraged to participate.
Go to nyc.gov/shareyourspacesurvey. There, you can register your space. By working together, we can build resilient communities, one space at a time. Learn more at nyc.gov/shareyourspacesurvey, or call 311.

You are listening to 'Prep Talk,' the emergency management podcast.

You are listening to 'Prep Talk,' and we are back.

As we mentioned earlier, we are honored to introduce to emergency management experts to our show, Linda Reissman and Penny Neferis. Thank you both for joining us. Can you share with our listeners your experience in the field and how you got to where you are today? We'll start with you, Linda.

Well I started in the emergency medical services field as a volunteer, and from there I became an instructor and got associated with many different organizations through my teaching. From there, I went to the Bureau of Emergency Services with the state Health Department, where I got to manage a number of different types of disasters, and planning for disasters as well, and planning for special events.

I've been a member of the disaster medical assistance team, NY4 and NY5, from 1996 till about 2016. But then I began my career as an emergency manager in healthcare with Maimonides Medical Center, and then moved over to Memorial Sloan Kettering, where I currently am the emergency manager overseeing emergency preparedness and business and clinical recovery.

I've been in the emergency response industry for over 20 years. I studied aeronautics in college, but specialized in safety, specifically aviation accidents. So crisis has been a passion of mine for quite some time.

I joined JetBlue as a founder, so part of the startup team. So when we built the emergency response program, we had a clean piece of paper, and we were able to build it from scratch. There is where we began the accident planning, and it obviously has evolved to include more now, from IT outages to active shooters and natural disasters, you name it, our team will work
on it. So I serve as their director of emergency response and business continuity there.

Omar Bourne: 08:57 Wonderful. A wealth of experience that we have in the room. This is going to be a good conversation.

Omar Bourne: 09:02 Linda, now you have, as you mentioned, experience in the municipal private governmental sectors of emergency management, public health, emergency service disciplines. You have also educated students about emergency and disaster management. So can you share how the health field approaches emergency management and how you coordinate with emergency managers in other industries and sectors like government?

Linda Reissman: 09:28 Well, the healthcare industry, as you know, is heavily regulated. We have to comply with joint commission and the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare in terms of our preparedness program. We have an all-hazards approach, just like many other organizations that do emergency management.

Linda Reissman: 09:46 The important thing to remember though, and I think Penny could elaborate as well, we kind of are like a mini-city in a hospital. We feed people, we clothe them, they need certain resources and services. And we have to approach emergency management both from an infrastructure perspective, as well as making sure that we have the ability to evacuate, shelter in place and do a number of different things.

Linda Reissman: 10:09 So we do have an all-hazards approach. Of course, the focus is on patient care as well and our visitors as well. We want to make sure that family members and folks that are with our patients are taken care of as well.

Linda Reissman: 10:21 I think the important thing about the approach in healthcare, really is the collaboration with our stakeholders, both in the private and public sector. We rely heavily on coalition-type planning, where we work with other organizations in healthcare, as well as partners like OEM, the Greater New York Hospital Association, and the City and the State health departments, their overarching planning program for healthcare makes sure that all of us can work together and share resources and best practices. I think it's been really a great program overall, citywide, in the last few years. I think the collaboration really has paid off.

Christina F: 10:57 Great.
Christina F: 10:58 Penny, in your role at JetBlue, you've been charged with developing and implementing the company's emergency response plans, training, procedures, command centers and exercises, among several other responsibilities. Can you also share how JetBlue approaches emergency management, and how you coordinate and work with emergency managers and other industries and sectors such as government?

Penny Neferis: 11:19 Sure.

Penny Neferis: 11:20 I'll start by saying the airline industry is incredibly competitive. But when it comes to crisis, we're all one big family. So from that aspect, we do work together really closely and help each other out. When one of us suffers an accident or a crisis, we're all in it together and want to help each other out. So that part of the business is incredibly collaborative.

Penny Neferis: 11:44 We also, obviously, partner with federal agencies, whether it's the NTSB or the FAA, and then obviously local partnerships. We're serving over a hundred cities, so making sure that we have that relationship across the whole network. I will say what we have here in New York City is really unique. The collaboration efforts with New York City Emergency Management is something that's a role model that we try and get our other cities to mimic as well. And it starts even with partnering in exercises, whether we're attending yours or they're attending ours, and trying to include as many players as possible from public and private.

Omar Bourne: 12:23 I'm glad that you mentioned exercises. For our listeners who may be unfamiliar, what does an exercise, what does practice for an emergency look like, especially in the airline industry?

Penny Neferis: 12:36 Sure.

Penny Neferis: 12:36 So a few years back, we had an exercise that we were planning at JFK where we simulated JetBlue having an airplane accident. In that situation, we did collaborate with the medical examiner in New York City, the Port Authority, you name it, any agency that wanted to participate, we welcomed them to come. So outside of having an accident, which fortunately we haven't had one, but how do you practice that, and how do you get all the players to the table?

Penny Neferis: 13:07 So everyone showed up, we rented out a hotel, had actors coming in playing the roles of family members. We set up actors
at the airport, and trying to work through our process and procedures in coordination with local and federal partners.

Omar Bourne: 13:24 And we work really closely with you, our agency, Emergency Management, for what we call a family assistance center. And you mentioned the hotel, and that's where we set up this family assistance center where families can come and gather information about the accident, about their loved ones, a place where they can also meet up with their family as well. So there's a lot that goes into the planning on that side of things. And as you said, we work really closely with you on that.

Omar Bourne: 13:59 And for Linda, for our listeners, can you tell them a little about how we would practice an emergency with you guys in the healthcare field, in the health and medical field?

Linda Reissman: 14:12 Sure.

Linda Reissman: 14:13 The most recent example I can think about, and there's been numerous exercises that we've done, both with OEM involved and other healthcare partners. But one of the most recent exercises was the Radiation Injury Treatment Network exercise. Sloan Kettering plays a unique role, although we are not a 911-receiving hospital, we play a unique role throughout the United States for radiation injury accidents as a result of either intentional or non-intentional nuclear events.

Linda Reissman: 14:42 In that type of scenario, we have to coordinate getting patients through the National Disaster Medical System to our hospital. We have to coordinate with OEM and the fire department. This past exercise, we were able to do things like simulate family members looking for their loved ones, being surged by a patient population that normally we wouldn't see, looking at different ways that we can search the hospital and accommodate without necessarily taking the care away from our regular patient population that comes through.

Linda Reissman: 15:16 And it's really important when you're testing to look at your capabilities, and to make sure that what you have on paper, you can actually operationalize. Anybody can write a plan, and I look at a plan like a wishlist. But can you operationalize it, and can you operationalize it when you need it, and do you have all the components in place to do that? And that goes with partners and things as well. If I say OEM's going to do something for me, I better let you know that I need you to do it for me. Or you need me to do something for you and we need to test that and make sure that it's valid.
One of the things that we say all the time, I say it every episode, is that ... and we tell it to our listeners ... winging it is not an emergency plan. We say that to our listeners, but we have the plans in place so when an emergency occurs, we're not winging it. We're practicing beforehand, so that when it occurs, we know who the players are, we know who we need and what we need from them so that the response can go as smoothly as possible.

What I love is that these are two different fields, airlines, hospitals, but at the end of the day, we're practicing, we're working with emergency management, and you hear the same things. What if a family member at a hospital needs to get information? What if a family member for an airline passenger wants to get information? How do we get that? How do we coordinate? And emergency management is the glue that brings it all together, and that's a good thing. So this is a great conversation.

I think also as New Yorkers, I've been here in emergency management 16 years, and in city government longer, and so I think we feel like we've seen everything.

Right.

Right?

And then you both have been in the system in different roles for a long time, and constantly we see we haven't seen everything. Whether it's something that happens in another part of the world with another airline or at another medical facility. And so you would adjust the plans and you keep looking, trying to think outside the box, and knowing that the next emergency won't look like the next one, and your plans have to be agile. So I think change is the only constant.

So speaking of events and things like that, is there any moment or event in your career that you would say defined your career as an emergency manager, or if you think to that one defining moment, what would it be? Starting with Linda.

I would have to say Hurricane Sandy. There was a point in the evening where the Con Ed plant had had an explosion up the block from us. The steam generation plant from Con Ed was getting flooded that services our hospital, and losing steam to a hospital loses heat and hot water. We got a text message from
NYU, "SOS, we're evacuating." We finally realized in very short order that a lot of things were happening at one time.

Linda Reissman: 18:16 The defining moment for me was having my CEO have the confidence in our emergency management team, our incident management team. But I learned something great in that moment, and it was our incident commander was Kathryn Martin at the time, and she was a senior vice president of the hospital. And as a cancer hospital, precision medicine is what we have to do, and the people that are around the table, we're all type A personalities, it's the best of the best when it comes to clinical care at Sloan Kettering.

Linda Reissman: 18:44 She stood up as we were revising our incident action plan, knowing that we were going to be receiving patients under tumultuous situations. And she said, "Everyone, I want to remind you of something. Done is better than perfect."

Linda Reissman: 18:59 And at that moment, she recognized the fact of who was at the table and the type of organization we are, but she also recognized the fact that our precision is a blessing, but it could be a detriment in this type of emergency situation, in such a potential disaster situation. She reset everyone to get things done to move forward. It taught me a lot, and it's something that I continue to think back on and teach my students and my co-workers.

Christina F: 19:23 Thank you. That is very, very powerful, and something I think we all can relate to and learn from.

Christina F: 19:29 Penny. What would you say is the defining moment so far for you?

Penny Neferis: 19:32 So I would have to go back to 9/11, and I know being a New Yorker and having lived it and witnessed it, but as JetBlue we were only about a year and a half old as a company, a few hundred employees, handful of planes. Seeing our city and our industry under attack, we didn't know what was going to happen. Were we going to shut our doors?

Penny Neferis: 19:56 But I felt like the heart of JetBlue and who we were going to be as a company when it came to crisis, that foundation was laid for that event, in that we set up a passenger assistance center, took the plan from our family assistance model, and set it up at a JFK hotel, and did what we've learned from, whether it's Red Cross and shelter operations, and went and got cots and rented out ballrooms and just took in any stranded customer from any
airline. And it was the least that we could do to just help and give back.

Penny Neferis: 20:30 I felt that that day, or that event, truly was this is what we're going to be like as a company, like we are going to help and give back to our communities, and help in any way possible.

Omar Bourne: 20:41 Both profound stories and anecdotes of your experiences.

Omar Bourne: 20:48 You've mentioned 9/11, Hurricane Sandy. What would you consider the biggest challenge facing the emergency management field today?

Linda Reissman: 20:57 I would have to say climate change. In looking and researching so many of the different types of disasters that have been happening in the last few years throughout the United States, the sense that I have really is that we still plan all hazards when we categorize things as a low probability, high impact or high probability, low impact.

Linda Reissman: 21:23 What I feel is happening lately, in the past few years, is that the high-impact events are not so low-probability anymore. We are seeing such significant floods. We're seeing such significant fires. We're seeing impacts to communities that are lengthy and that are deep. Resources are being stretched, as we saw in the hurricane season a few years ago.

Linda Reissman: 21:54 I think it makes us have to stop and think about how we're approaching emergency management. We may have to change our strategies, we may have to plan for things more aggressively than we have in the past. Just because it's not happening this second doesn't mean it can't happen, and it has been happening in other jurisdictions and other areas. So I'm mindful of that.

Christina F: 22:16 I would say a couple of years ago, I was at a event that Governor Cuomo was speaking at, and he said "There's been four hundred-year floods in the first three years I was an office." He's like, "The math isn't working anymore."

Christina F: 22:29 But it stuck with me, because things were modeled on the probability of it happening and everything, and really a lot of that has changed so rapidly that it's hard to keep up and hard to fathom how it'll keep going.

Linda Reissman: 22:42 And that's why I feel developing capabilities and being able to apply them in different plans and different situations is really
important. You can’t make a plan for every single thing, but you can develop capabilities and apply them, tweak them a little bit, and apply them to different scenarios. That’s my philosophy of planning.

Omar Bourne: **23:04** And this really speaks to what we do here at emergency management with our plans. We always like to say that they’re scalable, they’re flexible, for that very reason that you mentioned, Linda.

Omar Bourne: **23:16** Penny, how about you?

Penny Neferis: **23:18** So I think, to piggyback off of what Linda has shared, I think the variety of crisis that’s happening, whether it’s more active shooter, whether it’s social media events, things are happening more and more. IT outages, weather. My concern is really the burnout of the responders, whether it’s company, whether it’s hospital, whether it’s the city, because it feels like the scale is so much more than it has been in the past, and the level of response is so much more and more frequent.

Omar Bourne: **23:56** That’s very true. Very, very true.

Omar Bourne: **23:57** Where do you see emergency management in this country in the next five years or so?

Linda Reissman: **24:04** I see that there’s going to be ... and as it’s happening as we speak, because we’re investing in it ... I think the artificial intelligence, the ability to have more sophisticated tools for situational analysis, situational awareness, communication capabilities, all those I think will help us, as emergency managers, do a better job. Some predictive analysis tools, things like that.

Linda Reissman: **24:29** But I still think that the human factor cannot be taken out of it, and human capital. The folks that do the planning that apply these tools need to know exactly what it is that they’re doing. But I do see a level of sophistication that will help the emergency managers of the future. But nothing, I think, still replaces experience.

Penny Neferis: **24:47** Yeah. I think that from a private sector perspective, I think you’re going to see more companies investing in resiliency preparedness. It’s something that you can’t afford not to do anymore. So if you want to be a good company and stick around, you’re going to have to develop plans and teams and exercises and be able to respond.
Penny Neferis: 

I also think that we are going to get better at responding and more collaboration. I think that's just inevitable. I think with everyone coming to the table, there's no more silos like it used to be. And I also think that it's going to be an incredible opportunity for students, as universities perhaps are going to start doing more crisis management degrees, where that was something that didn't exist when I went to school. So I think you're going to see that happening as well.

Christina F: 

Yeah, I agree. Over the time ... like I said, I started here 16 years ago, and people didn't have degrees in emergency management, people came from EMS, fire, PD, something like that. And then a few years ago, on the graduate and undergraduate and even now at the high school level in the city, people show up with resumes with experience that they've studied the discipline of emergency management, which has evolved really quickly. Which is a good thing. So it'll be interesting, that's for sure.

Omar Bourne: 

We've talked about recovery, we've talked about response. One of the things that we've done, I know specifically with both of your agencies and organizations, is the preparation. And specifically Penny, we've been to JetBlue to give Ready New York presentations. Can you speak a little for our listeners about what those presentations look like and why they're important?

Penny Neferis: 

So September, obviously, is Preparedness Month. We dedicate a lot of the summer getting ready for that. New York City does an incredible job with producing handouts, training material, and just being up the road, having you guys come and visit with our New York team, we've even had you at our terminal to meet with our customers that come through. It's just so important, because that one person that you might make that impact, who might be a little bit more ready if a crisis was to happen in their home.

Penny Neferis: 

So every year, we will dedicate September to that, and try and do different educational events every week of September.

Omar Bourne: 

Anything you'd like to add on that, Linda?

Linda Reissman: 

Yeah, we've partnered with Ira's team here for the preparedness tables. We've had a lot of success with that. And I think that especially for our team here at Sloan Kettering and our staff, getting them to work is essential, making sure that they're prepared, that they can calmly stay at work knowing that their families are prepared as well.
Linda Reissman: 27:41 I think preparedness for patients is extremely important. Some of these patients are extremely ill. One of our goals is to make sure that patients don't use the emergency department as their primary physician during an emergency. Making sure that they understand what it is that they need to do prior to an emergency to prepare is very important.

Linda Reissman: 27:59 We've actually developed some materials for cancer patients, specifically, on preparedness, and had numerous tables during September, during preparedness month. It's something that we've been doing routinely now, and we go to different MSK locations. It's been very successful, and we're grateful for the partnership and for the materials.

Christina F: 28:20 We thank both of you for being such strong partners and having us out. We're happy to come, as you know. And I think it's also important, people hear preparedness from us on a literally daily basis, but showing the partnership, validating it with another party, and looking specifically at how are you prepared when you're a passenger or when you're working in the airline industry or when you're a patient or the family caregiver of a patient, there are so many different nuances, just like when we do things at schools or at senior centers.

Christina F: 28:50 So our partnership, it's really the lifeblood of what we do, and so we thank you both for that ongoing effort.

Christina F: 28:57 So now it's rapid response time, and if you're a first time listener or a first time guest, it's simple. Omar and I will ask you a few questions, and you'll give us the first answer that comes to mind.

Voiceover: 29:09 It's time for 'Prep Talk Rapid Response.'

Omar Bourne: 29:14 That's right. It's rapid response time. Let's get into it.

Omar Bourne: 29:18 The first question, Penny, I'm going to start with you. What is one emergency item you cannot live without?


Omar Bourne: 29:27 You know what's so funny about that? We've had a number of emergency managers on, and a lot of them say their phone. Yeah. See? Extremely important. Gives you all the information. Have to be in the know.

Omar Bourne: 29:39 How about you?
Linda Reissman: 29:40 Battery-operated phone charger.

Omar Bourne: 29:42 Ah, the battery-operated phone charger. I love it.

Christina F: 29:45 Next, what is your favorite TV show or movie? Linda?

Linda Reissman: 29:48 "Big Bang Theory."

Omar Bourne: 29:49 Ah, yes, that's a good one. It's really funny.

Omar Bourne: 29:53 How about you penny?

Penny Neferis: 29:54 There's so many. Right now, probably "The Crown."

Omar Bourne: 29:58 And I'm going to keep it here with you. Penny, what is currently on your playlist? What are you listening to?

Penny Neferis: 30:04 So it's because my son loves it, but I love it too. "The Greatest Showman" soundtrack.

Omar Bourne: 30:08 How about you, Linda?

Linda Reissman: 30:10 I'm digging the Brooklyn Duo lately.

Christina F: 30:12 Keeping it local.

Omar Bourne: 30:14 There you go.

Christina F: 30:15 We're not gonna argue with Brooklyn, sitting in Brooklyn.

Omar Bourne: 30:17 There you go. Exactly.

Christina F: 30:19 Alright, and now here's the last word. If possible, sum up the work you do in one word.

Penny Neferis: 30:23 Resilient.

Linda Reissman: 30:24 Collaboration.

Omar Bourne: 30:25 Nice.

Christina F: 30:25 Those are two of our favorite words.

Omar Bourne: 30:26 Yeah.

Christina F: 30:28 So I want to thank both of you for coming in here today, leading us to kick off Women's History Month. And thank you again for
all the work you do on behalf of the city and with the city. And we look forward to continuing it.

Intro: 30:43 That's this episode of 'Prep Talk.' If you like what you heard, you can listen anytime online or through your favorite RSS feed. Until next time, stay safe and prepared.